CHAPTER 3: DESIGNING EVALUATIONS TO ADDRESS COMMUNITY INTERESTS

On a practical level, planning an evaluation involves answering several basic questions:
1. What are you going to measure?
2. How are you going to measure it?
3. What do your measurements mean?

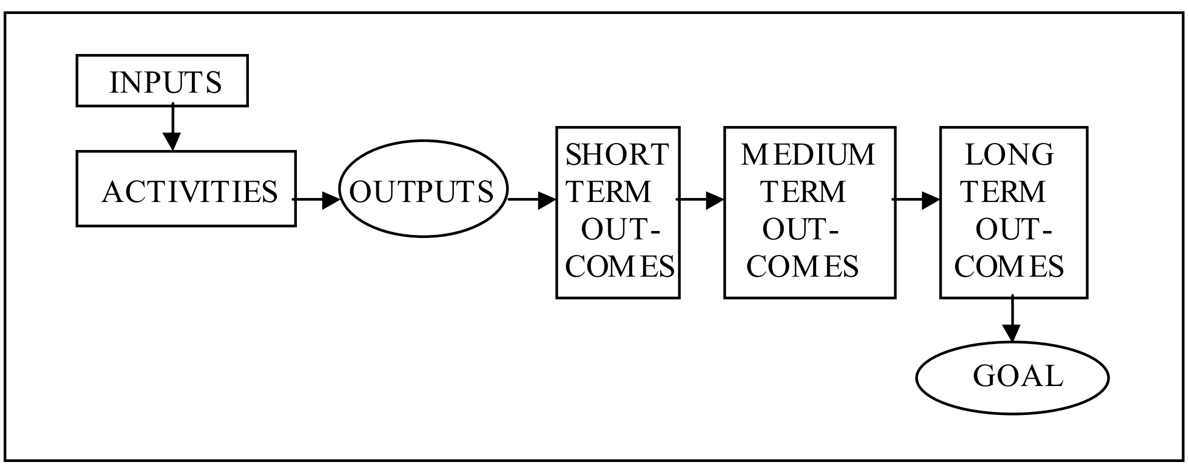
What Are You Going To Measure?

Typically, evaluations try to capture what happens as a result of the program. During the earlier stages of program development, evaluations measure whether program activities are occurring as expected, and if they are leading to the desired outcomes. Later, the evaluation may also assess how participants and communities change in response to services provided by the program. In other words, the evaluation also measures personal and community-level program outcomes.

The key to a successful evaluation is to ask and answer those questions that will provide the most valuable information. The program's consensus mapping process will help to generate key questions stakeholders need answered about whether the program is accomplishing its objectives and goals. The consensus mapping process provides you with the information you will need to develop your program's logic model.

A program logic model provides a blueprint of the pathways through which your program is designed to "work". It shows how you will use your resources to create and implement your program, and how your program will achieve its short- and medium-term objectives as it progresses towards its long-term goals. Developing a program logic model can strengthen your case for funding an evaluation plan, because it helps others to visualize the rationale behind the program and its evolution.

Figure 1. The Basic Components Of A Program Logic Model.



Components Of the logic model are:

-*Inputs* are the resources that go into the program.
-*Activities* are the actual events that take place as part of the program.
-*Outputs* are the direct products of program activities.
-*Outcomes* are the intended effects of the program.

- *Short-term outcomes* are the immediate effects of a program and often focus on changes in knowledge, attitudes, and skills of the target audience.
- *Medium-term outcomes* include changes in behavior or policies.
- *Long-term outcomes* take years to achieve.

The logic model can be thought of as a series of "if/then" questions. For example:

- If we obtain grant funding (input) to address teen pregnancy and abortion prevention, then we can implement such a program (activity).
- If we implement such a program (activity), then we can provide training to teens in making healthy lifestyle choices that influence their risks for becoming pregnant (output).
- If teens are exposed to information about healthy lifestyles (output), then some may choose healthier lifestyles (short-term outcome).
- If teens choose healthier lifestyles (short-term outcome), then they may reduce their risks for having an unplanned pregnancy (medium-term outcome).
- If teens reduce their risks for having unplanned pregnancies (medium-term outcome), then the rates of unplanned pregnancies may decline among these teens (medium-term outcome).
- If rates of unplanned pregnancies among these teens decline, then rates of low birth weight infants may also decline (long-term outcome).
- If rates of low birth weight infants decline, then infant mortality rates among teen mothers may decline (goal or health impact).

Using the consensus maps, work from left to right as the logic model develops. There are a number of excellent resources that may be of help as you develop your logic model. (See Chapter 8.)

Logic models can be broad or specific. They can be linked to one another to express how programs connect at the national, state, and local levels; or, you might want to prepare a set of logic models that represents different aspects of the program. The level of detail you put into your logic model should be determined by the purpose for which you intend to use the model – it is up to you. By using a logic model to describe your program, you can identify critical evaluation points that help your stakeholders to appreciate that the nature, scope, and focus of each evaluation may vary as program implementation progresses.

Although drafting consensus maps and logic models can be challenging, both are extremely worthwhile. The consensus mapping process helps empower and build trust with your community partners–both are critical for sustaining community support of your efforts. And logic models help you to think through your program's activities so the rationale is clear as to why you feel your program as planned will achieve its objectives and ultimately produce the desired long-term outcomes. The consensus mapping process and the conversion of the maps into a logic model allow your stakeholders to join in creating a visual description of your program that will be useful in ensuring that all understand the program, its missions and goals, the context in which it operates, the resources it needs to be successful, and the activities and services it will provide, and the logic behind the program's efforts to enhance the health of the community.

Logic models also help your partners to formulate questions that they would like to have answered by the evaluation process at each phase of the program.

How Are You Going To Measure Program Success?

How "big" the evaluation will need to be will depend on what you and your stakeholders want to learn, the resources you have to support the evaluation (including time), and how efficiently you use those resources.

Evaluations are simply management tools that inform decision-making. You and your stakeholders must determine which critical decisions are to be influenced by the evaluation results. Once this is known, you can then plan to be sure that the evaluation process produces the information required to inform those decisions.

One critical question is: Should the program continue? The answer will probably depend upon answers to several questions that collectively determine whether or not the program is successful enough to warrant a continued investment of staff, time, and dollars.

Another important question is: Can program effectiveness be enhanced? The evaluation should ask questions that test program effectiveness and seek data/information/inputs that can help guide effectiveness refinements.

Evaluation can also inform a funder's decision regarding whether or not to fund program expansion or replication.

Once the ideal full scope of questions has been established, it is easier to scale back to stay within the your budget. By identifying the critical questions that you want to answer you begin to determine the design needed for your evaluation.

Table 1 describes several types of both formative and summative evaluations, and gives examples of the types of questions that each type can answer. You should pick the design that best fits your program's needs. For a mature program you may want to use elements of both formative and summative evaluations to create a continuous, quality assurance monitoring system that can identify problems early so corrective action(s) can be taken.

<u>Table 1. Types Of Evaluation.</u>

<u>Formative Evaluations</u> are conducted early in a program to guide program refinements. They strive to answer the question: "Which process or method works better?"

Process Evaluations answer questions such as:

- Is the program operating as intended?
- Who is the program supposed to be serving and how?
- Who is the program actually serving and how?
- Why is the program succeeding, failing, or in need of revision?
- What unforeseen barriers/opportunities (if any) have impacted program services?

Program Implementation Evaluations answer questions such as:

- Is the program complying with program objectives, protocols, and procedures?
- Does the investment in the program match the tasks to be accomplished?
- What constraints and opportunities are impacting program performance?

<u>Summative Evaluations</u> are conducted at the end of a program to inform decisions about a program's worthiness for continuation or expansion.

Outcome Evaluations answer questions such as:

- Did the program have its intended effects on those individuals served by it:
    - o Short-term outcomes? (e.g. Was the risk of disease occurrence among program participants significantly reduced?)
    - o Long-term outcomes? (e.g. Was the short-term reduction in risk of disease occurrence among program participants sustained over time?)
- If yes, what helped this happen? What unintended effects did the program have?

Impact Evaluations answer questions such as:

- Did the program have its intended effects on the target community? If yes, why?
    - o Short-term impacts? (i.e. Was disease occurrence significantly reduced?)
    - o Long-term impacts? (i.e. Were short-term reductions sustainable?)
- What unintended effects/consequences did the program have?

Cost-Effectiveness Evaluations answer the question:

- What did it cost to deliver the desired outcome(s) and/or impact(s)?
- How does this cost compare to delivering similar results using other strategies?

In general, **process evaluation** questions provide information about how the program is working, who it is reaching, and under what community contexts. **Implementation evaluation** seeks to answer questions about your program activities and whether they are taking place as expected. These types of evaluation are often called **formative evaluations** because they provide useful information for building successful programs, and they usually allow you to sort, categorize and correlate evaluation data.

Summative Evaluations answer questions about program outcomes and impacts and attempt to prove its credibility. They seek to answer questions about the sum effect of your program activities. These usually take more time and money and may require the assistance of an independent evaluator to assure that they address causality and permit comparing and tracking of change over time.

After deciding what the evaluation is going to measure, you will need to decide how that measurement will take place. This involves the selection of the specific progress and/or outcome indicators that the evaluation will be assessing, and the practical consideration of how each indicator will be measured.

As an example, let's suppose your program was designed to reduce the level of smoking among teens in your community by replacing billboards that glamorize smoking with an anti-smoking campaign that features a diseased lung. This intervention seeks to counter the glamorous message designed to lure young people into becoming consumers. Given this as the underlying logic for the smoking-promotion program, then it might make sense to focus the evaluation of the anti-smoking campaign by answering such questions as:

- Have the number of cigarette billboards declined in the target community since the anti-smoking campaign began? Have the number of anti-smoking billboards increased?
- Are the anti-smoking billboards located where teens can easily see them?
- What do teens think of both the smoking and anti-smoking billboards?
- Have the teens perceptions of the image of smoking and non-smoking behaviors changed? And if so, in what way (positive or negative; etc)?
- Have cigarette sales to teens in the community changed since the anti-smoking campaign began? If so, did they go up? Remain the about the same? Or decline?

Each question to be answered requires one or more indicators to develop the answer. The indicator might be as simple as documenting the number of enrolled participants for comparison with the number estimated when the program objectives were established. On the other hand, client feedback may identify a variety of areas that you need to explore, such as the times and locations of clinics; the nature of the enrollment process; the cultural competence of program staff; the perceived quality of the services provided; or, the availability of childcare for clients using the clinic's services.

No evaluation can examine every aspect of your program. Therefore, the evaluation should focus on your most important issues and questions. As each question is considered and indicators identified, the modes of collecting information and the means for measuring each indicator must be determined. Client visits can be counted; the time that it takes to deliver a service can be measured; the number of clients lost to follow up during a specified period of time can be counted and converted into a percentage of total enrollees; and, each can be monitored for changes in the indicator over time (weeks, months).

Whichever methods you decide to use for data collection and for indicator measurements, once set up, those methods should be documented in an evaluation protocol that standardizes the methods to assure that they are used consistently throughout the life of the program. Staff training and supervision are needed to emphasize the importance of adhering to the evaluation protocol. Ideally, a continuous quality assurance monitoring system will be implemented to assure protocol compliance. Remember, the credibility of the program's claims to success will be determined by the accuracy of the indicator measurements and the fairness of indicator trends as program implementation progresses.

The evaluation protocol should be developed with the full range of stakeholders, recognizing that the perspectives of various stakeholders may legitimately differ, so they need to have input into the development of the evaluation protocol. Consider that program staff are happiest when clients are on time and ready to be seen when their name is called. To the staff a bit of a backlog of patients is good because it assures that that they do not have to wait for a patient to show up. On the other hand, the clients are happiest when they have an appointment and are seen on time, so they do not have to waste their time waiting for the staff to become available. Clearly, it takes inclusion of the full diversity of perspectives to get a fair and accurate portrayal of the program's operations. In this example, a participatory process that includes both clients and staff in the determination of measurements of operational efficiencies would increase the likelihood of a fair assessment from both perspectives.

Participatory evaluation planning, coupled with the valuing of the diversity in perspectives, can strengthen the program evaluation and enhance the quality of the results and recommendations that your management team needs to make proper judgments about the success of program operations.

In addition to deciding what to measure, it is critical that you also decide with your stakeholders how those measurements will be made. Here are some questions that illustrate some of your options:

- If your program is successful, who will change and how will they change?
- Are you looking for changes in behavior, knowledge, attitudes, awareness, beliefs about oneself, relationships among people, or something else?
- Which objectives/goals are measurable in the time frame available?
- Which changes do you expect to see in the short-term?
- Which changes are not expected until the program has been around a while?

Another consideration is the resources available for evaluation measurements. Those methods that yield highly accurate results are usually the most costly. One method for assessing success while adhering to your budget is to assess short- and medium-term changes in established indicators that are known to be correlated with health status. For example, in the case of a hypertension program, an early marker of success might be the degree to which clients change their diets, increase their exercise, or take medication on a regular basis. Or you could look even earlier in the change process at whether or not the client learns techniques for controlling their hypertension and demonstrates preparedness to make changes in their lifestyle.

In order to claim "success", a smoking-cessation program doesn't need to document that it has reduced lung-cancer deaths among its participants, only that it has reduced long-term smoking rates. There is already documentation that quitting smoking reduces death from lung cancer.

Once you decide what the focus of your measurements will be, take full advantage of what is already known in the scientific literature, both about how to measure and about the relationships between behaviors and the target disease/condition. Using a logic model can help you to identify what will serve as your short-term, medium-term, and long-term indicators.

Another cost-effective evaluation option is to document that clients are receiving services similar to those of a proven effective program. A process evaluation can show that your clients are engaged in the same way as clients in the program that you modeled your program after, and having similar results. You should use the same (or similar) short-term outcomes as did the model program. With this evidence, your program can make the case that its long-term outcomes will be similar to those previously demonstrated.

While this sounds straightforward, there may be some very real challenges with such validation studies. Outcomes often vary when similar programs are applied in different settings. Even if you are dealing with a population that is similar, you may have difficulty implementing the program in the same way. Often model programs are rich in resources and expertise. When they are replicated, the new programs do not have the same capacity and capability. Therefore, quality of the program activities is likely diminished.

What Do Your Measurements Mean?

Your logic model provides a great deal of guidance about which outcomes and issues the evaluation should focus on. In testing whether or not these things occur, you are essentially answering a series of evaluation questions, such as the following:

<u>To Determine Program Context:</u>

-What is the community/environmental context within which the program operates?
-How well does the program "fit" this context? How has this context helped and/or hindered the program?
-What is the organizational context within which the program operates? How has this context helped and/or hindered the program?
-Does the program duplicate the work of other programs and/or compete for participants?
-Does the program fill a gap in the community? If so, which gap?
-What other programs have tried to address this issue in this community? What was their experience?

<u>To Document Program Implementation:</u>

-How has the program been implemented?
-Are program activities occurring as expected? If not, why not?
-What resource (human, material) investment is made in the program activities?

-How do resource issues impact program implementation?
-How committed is the community to the program?

To Assess Program Results:
-Whom (or what) does the program serve best? Least? Under what circumstances?
-What does the program mean to the clients and to the community?
-How is this related to what the program has set out to accomplish?
-What are the indicators of progress towards these accomplishments?
-Has the program produced the intended results? What other effects has the program had?
-How well has the program addressed the initial needs it focused on?

To Develop Recommendations For Program Enhancement:
-How could program activities, resources, and goals be better aligned?
-What is reasonable to expect in terms of accomplishments given the community/environmental context, and resources available?
-What should the program keep doing to accomplish established objectives and goals?
-What should be changed, and how if those objectives and goals remain unchanged?
-How can the program be most effective without sacrificing community values?

Regardless of which questions you start with, stay open to others that may arise during the evaluation process and add to the value of the evaluation's insights. These may be added if reliable indicators can be developed to answer them. Remember to anticipate how your evaluation results will be used, and focus on your stakeholders' needs. Eliminate those questions that are just "easy" or "interesting", and keep those that focus on finding information essential for program success and accountability.

Demographic Information: If It's Not Collected, It Can't Be Analyzed

It is important to capture all the information you might need for your evaluation analysis right from the beginning of your program in order for it to be there when you need it. Think this through as you are planning your evaluation. While specific answers to questions or actual measurements are important, so are demographic characteristics (birth date, age, gender, marital status, race/ethnicity, tribe, primary language, education level, household income, employment status, etc.) that you will need when it comes time to do your analyses.

Be aware also that if you plan to eventually analyze your data by specific subgroups of clients, you must collect the information from the start in a way that will allow you to separate it into those subgroups when you are ready. Outlining all the types of information you will need to collect into an analytic plan, including the tables, etc. you plan to produce for reporting purposes, will help you to more easily identify areas you might have overlooked so they are not left out.